

Religious and Cultural Aspects of the

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By
VERRIER ELWIN

"I was naked, ye clothed Me"

ANNAS TWO

M. R. SESHAN
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"Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these?..... Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel;
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
And show the heav'ns more just."

—*King Lear.*

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FOREWORD

“THE world is too much with us” and we have thought of khadi in terms of utility, of economics and politics. But this has not prevented the thoughtful and the morally sensitive from feeling that the spinning wheel represents a moral and spiritual re-valuation. As long as the present individualistic and wasteful production and distribution of necessary and unnecessary goods continues, the purchaser, if he is spiritually alive, must feel the moral value of purchasing his goods from sources untainted by sweating and exploitation. The indifferent to such considerations may not necessarily be morally guilty or sinful, but the thought cannot be avoided that they need a quickening of their conscience by right moral and intellectual education. Such an education is placed before the public by Fr. Elwin in this little pamphlet.

For this task he is eminently fitted. Whatever he writes he writes from his personal realisations, and his realisations are due to the fact that he approaches new things and thoughts in the spirit of sympathy and charity. Those who know him know that, like C. F. Andrews, he is one of those rare

spirits, who bend the knee wherever the knee is bent, in worshipful prayer. The *Anter-yamin*, the knower of all from within, knows that all worship is meant for Him. Guided by this catholic spirit, the writer has readily appreciated, and made his own the music of the spinning wheel. He has understood the philosophy underlying it and accepted the novel but just re-valuations. He has therefore succeeded in elaborating upon what is given in the form of *Sutras* in Gandhiji's writings.

The reader, if he wants to appreciate the pamphlet, must bring with himself the sympathy, the faith, the will, to believe that the author has brought to bear upon his subject. Failing that, he will only be confirmed, in his preconcieved moral and intellectual vanities. He will only see in things Divine the usual sentimental stuff.

Sri Gandhi Asbaram, }
Meerut, 6-11-31. }

J. B. KRIPALANI.

Religious and Cultural Aspects of Khadi

I

This pamphlet does not attempt to assess the economic advantages of Khadi; it assumes them. They have already in a host of publications* received sufficient and convincing advertisement. My immediate task is rather to explore some of the religious and cultural aspects of the subject. I have not come easily to my belief in the Charkha: my enthusiasm for it is not the fruit of a sudden emotional conversion. Until I began to gain a little knowledge of the villages of India, I was indeed frankly sceptical; but directly I began to acquire even my present slight knowledge of village conditions, that scepticism began to disappear. To-day I find myself believing in Khadi with the entire conviction of my mind, as not only the genuine solvent of India's most pressing problem, that of poverty, but as also the symbol of a philosophy

* See especially R. B. Gregg: *Economics of Khaddar*, S. V. Puntambekar and N. S. Varadachari: *Hand-Spinning and Hand-Weaving*, Dr. P. C. Roy: *Deshi Rang* and Rajendra Prasad: *Economics of Khadi*.

and a way of life that will prevent that problem ever recurring. It is, if I may humbly say so, as one who has dedicated his life to religion, that I have found myself drawn to this cause of most spiritualised politics, and most highly ethicalised economics; and it is therefore to men and women of religion that I address this pamphlet.

II

The Charkha represents the enlargement of the human conscience, the invasion of the economic and political spheres by the ideals of religion. I remember, as a schoolboy, listening with great surprise to a lecture by one of our English sociologists on the relation of trousers to Religion. I had not previously imagined that the two things were in any way connected. But the lecturer pointed out that if we went to a shop to buy a pair of trousers without considering whether the maker of the trousers was a good employer or a bad one, or whether our money was going into the pockets of the few rich people or the many poor people, we were actually committing a sin just as serious as an offence against the ordinary moral code. I had not thought of it before, but of course directly it was pointed out, I saw how absolutely true it was. We have no business to spend our money in the light-hearted way we do. By buying the goods of any manufacturer or firm

that sweats its labour, or exploits its market, we are becoming in effect accessories to its crimes. And that is the real challenge of the Khadi Movement. The new religious humanism of khadi lays a serious moral obligation on every man and woman of conscience to consider into whose pockets his money is going. "Economics", says Gandhiji, "to be worth anything, must be capable of being reduced to terms of religion and spirituality".

For the first duty of every religion is to its poor. At Hayes Farm, in Yorkshire, some of the workers and employers from Lancashire gathered to meet Gandhiji, and held a service in which they prayed that the will of God might prevail with regard to England's cotton-market. Gandhiji spoke very frankly to them, explaining how in his view politics, economics and ethics were vitally connected, how he had been led to raise the banner of Truth above all other things, and why he had placed the spinning-wheel before the starving millions of India. "I dare not take before them the message of God. I may as well place before a dog the message of God as before those hungry millions who have no lustre in their eyes and whose only God is their bread. I can take before them a message of God only by taking the message of sacred work before them. It is good enough to talk of God whilst we are sitting here after a nice

breakfast, and looking forward to a nicer luncheon, but how am I to talk of God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day. To them God can only appear as bread and butter. Well, the peasants of India were getting their bread from their soil. I offered them the spinning-wheel in order that they may get butter, and if I appear today before the British public in my loin-cloth it is because I have come as the sole representative of those half-starved, half-naked dumb millions. We have prayed that we may bask in the presence of God's sunshine. I tell you it is impossible to do so whilst millions are knocking at your door."

This is an essentially religious attitude. For religion is love, and the reason why people are attracted to the cause of Khadi is that Khadi is love.

"Seek Love in the pity of others' woe,
In the gentle relief of another's care,
In the darkness of night and the winter's snow,
In the naked and outcast—seek Love there."

That was William Blake's message at the beginning of the Industrial Movement in Europe. Today, Gandhiji says, "The call of the spinning-wheel is the noblest of all, because it is the call of love, and love is Swaraj." But love is always practical, and is Khadi practical? I believe it is. "In my view", said Sir Samuel Hoare recently, "the truest friend of Britain and India is the man

who faces the difficulties in a realistic spirit with the intention of mastering them." This is just what the leaders of the Khadi Movement have done. Faced with the economic ruin of the vast majority of their countrymen, they have not prescribed the degrading specific of a dole; they have provided a scheme of work, immediately available to the humblest peasant, which will occupy his months of enforced idleness, and inspire his leisure hours with the ideals of discipline and religion. "Hunger", says Gandhiji, "is the argument that is driving India to the spinning-wheel". "Without a cottage industry the Indian peasant is doomed. He cannot maintain himself from the produce of the land. He needs a supplementary industry. Spinning is the easiest, the cheapest, and the best." "Hand-spinning solves the problem of India's chronic poverty, and is an insurance against famine." Gandhiji has faced the difficulties in a realistic spirit, and he will master them.

Khadi is a perfectly disinterested means of serving the poor: that is why it is one of the most beautiful politico-economic enterprises ever undertaken. It is a test of a man's sincerity, the litmus paper that reveals his actual qualities. The man who is simply out for political advantage will not care for Khadi, nor will those who are serving the poor with some ulterior motive. Khadi is

not really an affair of politics at all, but the fact that it should be so regarded is the greatest compliment yet paid to Congress. Khadi means love of the poor; and if Khadi and Congress are associated, it is because Congress is the chief friend and protector of the poor in the whole of India.

III

Khadi not only solves the economic problem of the poor, but the moral and social problem also. This fact is put so well in *Hand-spinning and Hand-Weaving* that I will quote it at length.

“India demands not the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few but its just distribution among the many. India demands again an immediate solution to the problem of wide-spread unemployment. The poor agriculturist population all over the country must find a supplementary occupation suited to their social and environmental conditions. The mills cannot fulfil the national object. However efficient their output, they can never help in the equitable and even distribution of wealth in the land. They localise production in place of spreading it out and placing in the reach of all the poor and the needy a suitable occupation that will give them their sustenance. The revival of hand-spinning offers the only unique opportunity for massing the labour of millions now in penury due to enforced idleness and putting to productive work the inherited skill of centuries, fast dying out and starved. The millions will then get such work as would leave no room for moral and material discomfort. The horrors of the slum which are unknown to the rural artisan population are the inevitable concomitants of mill concentration wherein there is no escape from moral deterioration or physical ruin. The toil, the drudgery and in fact the servitude to the machine that the mill workman has to endure impose such a severe strain even to his physical condition that he becomes a wreck very soon.

There is no escaping the tyranny of the machine, the din and noise of the factory. By patient social work much can be done to relieve the suffering of the mill labourer who is not at present properly housed but put in dark and insufferable lodging places, who does not enjoy free unpolluted air nor association pulling him off the track of drink and other vices. But the very best done in this direction cannot do away with the lasting effects which mill employment leaves on him. The village craftsman and artisan is far more healthy and enjoys better surroundings than his brother, the mill worker. The smaller wage earned by him is more than compensated by the habit of contentment developed in cottage surroundings. The future of the country rests truly with the village artisan. He has to recharge, in Mr. Havell's words, the whole psychological atmosphere of his home with creative energy. The handloom weaver will have to display his marvellous skill in work and design and find free vent for his individuality. There is great hope that this will come to be. The craftsman of the future years will naturally be fastidious in respect of material which he owns and on which he expends his labour and skill and the more so since he would be personally responsible for the quality of the finished product. Becoming a free agent in production he will enrich the national taste and safeguard it against decay. His hand being full of work, he will use his talent to best advantage. Not being cramped in body and soul he will make the citizen of the future and help in the rebuilding of the manhood of the nation. An industry with a new economic and cultural outlook will have been revived and then and not till then will the nation become the nursery of the beautiful and cease to suffer from the twin diseases of 'standardised minds and standardised commodities'".

IV

The Charkha has another function, no less valuable. It not only raises the poor, it lowers the rich.

"When Adam delved, and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?"

Mr. Benn once pointed out in the House of Commons that what he called "the egalitarian principle" does derive real support from a type of work which can be shared by rich and poor alike. The Charkha unites rich and poor, literate and illiterate, into one family; without shedding a drop of blood, without a even a bitter word, it effects a far-reaching social revolution. The educated man who uses Khadi will never be arrogant or superior: the labourer who uses it will neither be subject to class-hatred, nor infected with servility: he will have a natural dignity, and will chain his rights in the spirit of Ahimsa.

"I cannot conceive", says Gandhiji, (it is one of his most beautiful sayings), "any higher way of worshipping God than by doing for the poor, in His name, the work they themselves do."

As you turn the wheel, your mind is naturally linked with the poorest of the poor throughout the length and breadth of India. In the hum of the wheel you hear "the still, sad music of humanity." You realise that you are of one human stuff with the living skeletons of Orissa, the half-clad multitudes of Behar, the "untouchables" of South India, the illiterate masses in Bengal, the primitive Bhils and Ghonds; you feel your unity with the fine spinners of Andhra, the self-sacrificing workers of Sabarmati or Wardha, the craftsmen of Meerut wedding high art to

their "body-labour". Such sense of unity is worship; it is religion!* "Since I believe that where there is pure and active love for the poor there is God also, I see God in every thread that I draw on the spinning-wheel."

The music of the Charkha is the hymnology and psalmody of the worship of *Daridra Narayan*. I have listened, through a long afternoon to a forty-wheel orchestra in a Bhil Ashram of Panch Mahals. I have heard the music rising up in the poorest Raniparaj cottages at Vedchhi. I have seen it bringing new hope to untouchables at Navsari. I have talked with many who found it their consolation in prison. I have heard the strong even drone, like a *japa-yajna*, of Gandhiji's own Charkha.

Jesus Christ once drew an imaginative picture of the Day of Judgment in order to show what were the ultimate standards of human character. The Judge, turning to those who are to enter the City of Truth, says, "Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me food; I thirsted, and ye gave me drink; I was harbourless, and ye lodged me; I was naked and

* "A person can never realise his unity with God, except when unity with the whole nation throbs in every fibre of his being."
—Swami Rama Tirtha.

ye clothed me ; I was sick and ye visited me ; I was in prison and ye came unto me." And they answer him saying, "Master, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee ; or athirst and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee harbourless, and lodged thee ; or naked, and clothed thee ? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ?" And then the Judge, who is Love and Truth, replies, "Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

"I was naked, and ye clothed Me." Those who buy and wear Khadi—such a simple, ordinary, everyday affair—have the romance and wonder of clothing *Daridra Narayan* in the persons of his poor.

V

Religion is not only inspired social service : it is also discipline, concentration, prayer, *Yoga*. The aim of *Yoga* is to discipline the mind, to make it one-pointed, so that it may explore the realities of the supersensual world. The Charkha is a valuable auxiliary to this. The art of drawing a fine thread of even count develops the habit of concentration ; it is a form of "body-labour" which trains and develops the mind. We might call it a practical Pelmanism for the

masses. The regular use of the Charkha disciplines the character. "It needs plodding. Ability to plod is Swaraj. It is *Yoga*." There is no need to fear its monotony. "Monotony is the law of nature.....The monotony of necessary occupation is exhilarating and life-giving." Let me remind you of the great Khadi Yogin, Sjt. Zaverbhai Patel, a busy schoolmaster and agriculturist of Gujerat, who spun twelve lacs of yards of yarn in a year. He did it because he was "convinced of religiously spinning as the indispensable duty of social man." "The peace and powers of concentration and determination that I developed," he said, "were a unique gain. Mine had been a wild life before non-co-operation, which brought me from darkness into light, from storm into peace. And this year's effort has been an education. What heaps of time we waste every day, and how best we could turn it to account if we but meant it! And in a life so filled with dutiful toil, how can there be any room for the devil?"

The Khadi-Yoga, which is the fitting Yoga of a socialistic age, does not confer supernormal powers on a few adepts: it opens the door to fuller life to millions. It confers what are far more valuable than trances and ecstasies—the virtues of humility, patience, regularity, conscientiousness and love.

VI

The Charkha is an aid to meditation. Its associations are such as to drive away impure and angry thoughts. It has not been degraded by modern commercialism : it is a noble and pure industry which dignifies those who take to it. Its rhythmic motion provides a good background to prayer. It is the finest prayer-wheel ever made. It drives to song and worship. Kabir says, "What a wonderful lotus it is, that blooms at the heart of the spinning-wheel of the universe! Only a few pure souls know of its true delight. Music is all around it, and there the heart partakes of the joy of the Infinite Sea." When I sit at the wheel I cannot help singing : "music is all around it." Some of our English hymns seem especially suitable. Often I sing Whittier's song of peace :

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
 Till all our strivings cease ;
 Take from our souls the strain and stress,
 And let our ordered lives confess
 The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
 Thy coolness and Thy balm :
 Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire ;
 Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire
 O still small voice of calm !

Sometimes :—

Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round
 Of circling planets singing on their way :
 Guide of the nations from the night profound
 Into the glory of the perfect day :

Rule in our hearts, that we may ever be
Guided and strengthened and upheld by Thee.

We would be one in hatred of all wrong,
One in our love of all things sweet and fair,
One with the joy that breaketh into song,
One with the grief that trembleth into prayer,
One in the power that makes Thy children free
To follow Truth, and thus to follow Thee.

Or sometimes in the evening,

Now all the heavenly splendour
Breaks forth in starlight tender
From myriad worlds unknown ;
And man, the marvel seeing,
Forgets his selfish being,
For joy of beauty not his own.

His care he drowneth yonder,
Lost in the abyss of wonder :
To heaven his soul doth steal :
This life he disesteemeth,
The day it is that dreameth,
That doth from truth his vision seal.

The art of spinning is not only a singularly happy one, but its regular, even rhythm is soothing and comforting to the nerves. A writer quoted in *Young India* some years ago spoke of a tragic experience. "I hastened to my room and there in the dark struggled with an anguish which rent me from top to toe. I prayed and strove for some time, and then turned to the spinning-wheel and found in it a magical comfort. The quiet, regular motion of its rhythm immediately steadied me and the thought of its service brought me nearer to God." Gandhiji has also emphasised the value of the wheel as an aid to *brahmacharya*.

“A person who wants to subdue his passions has need to be calm. All commotion within him ought to cease; and so quiet and gentle is the motion of the spinning-wheel that it has been known to still the passions of those who have turned it in the fulness of faith. I have been able to compose my anger by turning it.” Gandhiji particularly recommends the wheel to young men and women. “They will find that shortly after they sit down to spin, their passions begin to subside.”

VII

“The Charkha,” says Gandhiji, “is a symbol of simplicity, self-reliance, self-control.” “I verily believe that when millions take to it as a sacrament, it will turn our faces Godward.” In the company of the Charkha have come visions and ideals, a raised moral standard, a sense of wider brotherhood, the banishing of idleness, a new self-respect and independence. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel once said to me, “We find that when the Charkha goes into a cottage, the toddy bottle goes out of it.” The two things cannot live together; they are inconsistent—but even more, the Charkha is, I believe, an actual substitute for the drink habit. We have heard a lot recently of the necessity of finding some “Moral Substitute for War.” You cannot merely abolish war, for war contains a number of positive values such as discipline, heroism,

service, devotion, the sense of responsibility, and so on, which need to be preserved. I have argued elsewhere that in Satyagraha we have this moral substitute for war. Here I want to suggest that in the Charkha we have the *Moral Substitute for Alcohol*. You cannot, I believe, simply abolish alcohol. For wine (I speak, of course, of its moderate use) does embody some very positive values, and to lose them would be the impoverishment of mankind. It acts not only as a stimulant and the balm of tired and jaded nerves, it is also a token of joy, the expression of the heart's delight. It is a means of fellowship between man and man. It is not a drug, it is an element in the art of living. Both Christianity and Sufism have enshrined its symbolism at the intimate heart of their mysticism. Mere prohibition will always fail for this reason; you must provide a substitute. But the Charkha embodies just the same values as wine, without any of its dangers. It is a stimulant to the reason and conscience; it is the perfect restorer of the ruffled mind, it is the happiest occupation in the world. It is an instrument of human brotherhood. There is a wonderful freemasonry among all users of the wheel, all wearers of Khadi. Rich and poor, literate and illiterate, find through a common occupation a new fellowship. It is not a mere industry; it is a factor in the art of noble living. It is the moral substitute for drink.

Is it fantastic to suggest that the takli is the moral substitute for the cigarette ?

The Charkha will do away with the profession of begging as a means of livelihood. It will save the peasant from the curse of his idle hours. It destroys, as has been well said, "the old psychology of helplessness, restores initiative to the nation and imparts to it an atmosphere in which sustained and continuous effort among all people becomes possible."

The wearing of the white Khadi dress induces habits of personal cleanliness. School boys, for example, who wear Khadi are generally marked by an increased smartness and cleanliness.

Wordsworth described the many moral functions* of the wheel in a sonnet that

* *The Takli Teacher* enumerates the following desirable personal qualities as developed by the use of the Takli :—

"Desirable personal qualities developed by the use of Takli are: Patience; Persistence; Concentration; Self-control; Calmness; poise, and balance; Realisation of importance and value of detail; Ability to do more than one thing at a time, making one of them so habitual that its control and operation are almost unconscious; Sensitiveness, sureness and delicacy of touch and of muscular control and co-ordination; (these qualities would be very useful, later, to any boy who becomes a surgeon, a pathologist, a botanist, a microscopist, a painter, a sculptor, a draughtsman, whether free-hand or mechanical and engineering, an architect, a physicist, a chemist, an engraver, a jeweller, a watch repairer, or any fine craftsman); Realisation of value of cumulative and sustained individual effort, even though separate efforts be of short duration: thus a realisation of the value of time; Realisation of value of co-operative work; Self-respect and self-reliance arising from recogni-

deplored the decay of the industry in England.

Grief, thou hast lost an ever-ready friend
 Now that the cottage spinning-wheel is mute ;
 And care—a comforter that best could suit
 Her forward mood, and softliest reprehend ;
 And love—a charmer's voice, that used to lend,
 More efficaciously than aught that flows
 From harp or lute, kind influence to compose
 The throbbing pulse—else troubled without end ;
 Even joy could tell, joy craving truce and rest
 From her own overflow, that power sedate
 On those revolving motions did await
 Assiduously, to soothe her aching breast—
 And—to a point of just relief-abate
 The mantling triumphs of a day too blest.

VIII

A remarkable article has recently appeared in *The Catholic World*, a leading Catholic review of America, from the pen of Mr. Theodore Maynard. "I am inclined to think", he says, "that the part of Mahatma Gandhi's programme that has been most effective is that part which has most often been jeered at—his revival of the hand-spinning wheel....I take the Charka to be a symbol, as well as a very practical instrument, and therefore let it stand for the whole revolt against industrialism. By fighting against the domination of Lancashire, whose machines

tion of his ability to create something of economic value useful to himself, to his family, to the school and to the village, province or nation."

have destroyed the greatest of the Indian village industries, Gandhi is doing much more than fighting for India; he is at the same time fighting the thing which degrades the spirit of man wherever this prime modern evil triumphs the materialistic concept of industry. It is not a question here of a conflict between the civilizations of East and West, but of a conflict between God and Mammon."

The Charkha is the symbol of simplicity and self-reliance. A man who uses it is bound to simplify himself, in order to make his life harmonious. Gandhiji quotes "the Chinese gardner-sage" as saying, "If a man has a machine-like heart in his breast, he has lost his grasp of pure unity, and becomes involved in complexity." The spinning-wheel, he continues, stands for "a simple life and high thinking. It is a standing rebuke against the modern mad rush for adding material comfort upom comfort and making life so complicated as to make one doubly unfit for knowing oneself or one's God." The Charkha, in fact, is in line with a movement that has steadily gathered impetus during the last fifty years, to do away with the artificial complexity of modern mechanised civilisation, and return to a more natural life close to the soil and to reality. The Charkha stands for the dignity of manual work which those far-seeing souls whom we call saints

have always emphasised. Christ in the carpenter's shop was one of the pioneers of this movement; and among his successors we think of St. Francis repairing the ruined church of San Damiano, Tukaram repairing the ruined shrine of Sri Vitthal by the banks of the Indrayani, Tolstoy on his farm with a spinning-wheel in his study, and Gandhiji himself, proud to describe his profession as that of "a bhangi, a scavenger, a labourer, a weaver." I can well imagine that if St. Francis were alive to-day in India he would go to and fro founding Khadi bhandars*, and that Christ would have made an Indian Nazareth a production-centre of Charkhas and pinjans.

IX

Let us consider the opinion of three of these masters of the art of living who have arrived at the conclusion that the simple life of the peasant is the true life, nearest to reality. Christ proclaimed His belief by His whole life: He deliberately chose to live as a poor man, a hand-labourer, in a village. But let us see what Wordsworth has to say about it. In his famous *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, he observes that in the condition of humble and rustic life, "the essential passions

* It is interesting to note that St. Clare and her sisters used to spin the yarn for the altar-cloths used by the Franciscan brothers.

of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are under less restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately contemplative, and more forcibly communicated.....and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with beautiful and permanent forms of nature." In the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*, there is a beautiful stanza which expresses Wordsworth's love of the peasant.

"Love had he found in huts where poor men lie;
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

Wordsworth himself was a consistent opponent of the enervating luxury and elaboration of modern civilization. "Men have been pressing forward, for some time", he says, "in a path which has been betrayed by its fruitfulness; furnishing them constant employment for picking up things about their feet, when thoughts were perishing in their minds. While mechanic arts, manufactures, agriculture, commerce, and all those products of knowledge which are confined to gross, definite and tangible objects, have, with the aid of experimental philosophy, been every day putting on more brilliant colours; the splendour of the imagination has been fading

.....calculations of presumptuous expediency groping its way among partial and temporary consequences, have been substituted for the dictates of permanent and infallible conscience, the supreme embracer of consequences." This is precisely the burden of Gandhiji's indictment of modern Western civilisation. "It is not the British people who rule India, but modern civilization rules India through its railways, telegraphs, telephone etc.....If British rule were replaced tomorrow by Indian rule based on modern methods India would be none the better." "Increase of material comforts, it may be generally laid down, does not in any way whatsoever conduce to moral growth." The case against a mechanical materialist civilization has never been put better than in the sonnet :

" The world is too much with us ; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers ;
Little we see in Nature that is ours :
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

Like Gandhiji, Wordsworth had a great respect for manual labour. One of his poems, composed while he was engaged in digging with a friend, is addressed *To the Spade of a Friend*. The spade, he says, is "a tool of honour", "a trophy nobler than a conqueror's sword." It is "a monument of peaceful happiness". It gives to him who uses it,

" Health, meekness, ardour, quietness secure,
And industry of body and of mind :

And elegant enjoyments, that are pure
As nature is,—too pure to be refined.”

These lines might apply equally well to the Charkha.

Tolstoy is the next link in the tradition. Every one knows how in middle life he turned from the life of luxury in which he had been born, and began to live the life of a peasant, exalting the dignity of “body-labour.” “It came about,” he says, “that the life of our circle, the rich and learned, not merely became distasteful to me, but lost all meaning in my eyes. All our actions, discussions, science and art, presented itself to me in a new light. I understood that it is all merely self-indulgence, and that to find a meaning in it is impossible; while the life of the whole labouring people, the whole of mankind who produce life, appeared to me in its true significance. I understood that *that* is life itself, and that the meaning given to that life is true; and I accepted it.”

And finally Gandhiji says this :—

“In our country manual labour is regarded as a low occupation. Our poets have gone so far as to describe the happy rich as never having to touch mother earth at all, so much so that hair begins to grow on the soles of their feet! Thus the highest function (body-labour) to which a man is born and with which, the sages tell us, Brahman created

him, we have in fact looked down upon as something mean and degrading. We should spin therefore if only to guard against the pernicious tendency of regarding the toilers as being low in the social scale. Spinning is therefore as obligatory on the prince as on the peasant." The Charkha, we might say, is the barber which removes the hair from the soles of our feet !

I have dwelt on this at some length, because the philosophy of simplicity and "body-labour" is the background against which the Khadi Movement must be regarded. Unless we see the point of this philosophy, we shall naturally regard Khadi as a mere attempt to set back the clock or to return to mediaevalism. But when we grasp its vast implications we realise that it is a great step forward into the new world which is inevitably coming to the birth.

X

We have already seen how the Khadi Movement binds rich and poor into one family. It also breaks down the barriers between caste and caste, between creed and creed, and even between nation and nation. "For me", says Gandhiji, "the spinning wheel and Khadi are the symbols of all-India unity; therefore I regard them as a national sacrament." "Hand-spinning means the

greatest voluntary co-operation the world has ever seen. It means co-operation among millions of human beings scattered over a very wide area and working for their daily bread." The sense of unity is gained through a universal occupation in which all can share. "We can attain unity", says Tagore, "only through work." Even the simple white Khadi dress with its artistic roughness, fosters the sense of brotherhood. Wear it, and you at once find yourself the member of a great fraternity: you have entered a company of brothers and sisters who are bound to one another by the noblest of ties—the love of the poor and suffering. Here is the secret of unity—to lose our own particular interests in love and sacrifice for the whole.

Khadi is even more than this: it is a symbol of love for the whole world. "The Charkha", says Gandhiji, "is a symbol not of commercial war, but of commercial peace. It bears, not a message of ill-will towards the nations of the earth, but of good-will and self-help. I may deserve the curses of posterity for many mistakes of omission and commission, but I am confident of its blessings for suggesting a revival of the Charkha. I stake my all on it. For every revolution of the wheel spins peace, good-will and love." It may cause a temporary distress in Lancashire, but in the end the Khadi Movement must benefit not only Lancashire, but the

whole world. For the cause of Labour is international, and if there are peasants starving in Orissa their misery will react to the detriment of peasants in Europe. And Khadi is a challenge to the wealthier nations of the West to make some sacrifice for the sake of their immeasurably poorer brethren of India. In this sense, Khadi is a call to nobility and generosity. Gandhiji emphasised these points in his visit to Lancashire. "I am pained," he said, "at the unemployment here. But here is no starvation or semi-starvation. In India we have both. If you went to the villages of India, you would find utter despair in the eyes of the villagers, you would find half-starved skeletons, living corpses. If India could revive them by putting life and food into them in the shape of work India would help the world. Today India is a curse." And it is a striking fact that after hearing Gandhiji many of the Lancashire unemployed seemed to understand. One of them is quoted as saying, "I am one of the unemployed, but if I was in India, I would say the same thing that Mr. Gandhi is saying."

In fact, Gandhiji's pilgrimage to Lancashire was an act typical of a Khadi user: it was an act of courtesy and chivalry, a gesture of the friendliness that lives in every revolution of the wheel.

XI

While Khadi is not necessarily a political symbol, we may justly claim that it is the truly religious way of gaining freedom. "Swaraj is unattainable without the beautiful art of hand-spinning becoming universal in India." "In hand-spinning is hidden the secret of Swaraj." Khadi and Satyagraha are inseparable like two sides of a coin—Khadi is the outward expression, the sacrament, of the mental outlook of the true Satyagrahi. It is not a voluntary extra in the national programme: it is its vital nerve-centre. For Khadi will usher in a Swaraj that is worth having. The Ashrams and Bhandars of the Khadi Movement are the fortresses and bulwarks of the new world against the bad old world of materialism, imperialism, militarism and the mechanistic conception of industry. A free India, inspired with the ideals that are implicit in the gospel of Khadi, will have a message for every nation; she will recall the world to simplicity, truth and love.

Khadi therefore (whether it implies the regular discipline of the wheel or simply the using of the cloth) is not only a solvent of the tragic problem of India's poverty: it is a great symbol old as India itself.* The

* From the dawn of history, the Charkha has been recognised as a religious symbol. "Spinning and weaving are as old as the Vedas. In fact the weaver like the vedantin was the

ancient religious culture of the Rishis is here blended with the new humanistic culture of the Congress. It means sympathy and love—the supreme privilege of religion. It is a form of Yoga, and leads to discipline, patience, concentration. It is the symbol and support of unity. It is a vital element in Satyagraha. It challenges all men and women of culture and religion to adopt it for the sake of their poorer brothers and sisters.

XII

“Man is sacrifice”, says the *Chandogya Upanishad*. “The first twenty-four years are his morning libation: the next twenty-four years are his mid-day libation; and the last twenty-four years are his evening libation.” And a hymn of the *Rig-Veda* speaks of the “triple twisted thread” of the morning,

first superb product of Hindu genius. The Brahma Sutras of the one and the Karpasa Sutras of the other furnished the material out of which the almost perfect system of Brahman philosophy and the finest fabrics of cotton were fashioned and woven. When Egypt built her massive pyramids and Babylon's king Hamurabi wrote his great code, India was already set on this unique path. The vedantin, the तत्त्ववाय (the weaver of the eternal verities), clothed the nescience of man's soul, while the weaver, the तन्तुवाय (weaver of cotton threads), clothed the nakedness of man's body. The story of India's golden age and of her immortal civilization is summed up in the lives of those two, the Vedantin, the true seer, and the weaver, the real artist.” (*Hand Spinning and Hand Weaving.*)

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noon and evening sacrifice. Khadi indeed demands sacrifice of us, but the sacrifice the Eternal Weaver is calling us, so that we may each offer to Him a human life of even count, strong and fine, which can be woven into the living garment of immortality.



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